DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 158 176 CG 012 744

AUTHOR Quenon, Betty, Ed.
TITLE Growing Up Is Very Hard to Do! Benefits of an Elementary Counseling Program.
INSTITUTION Coloma Community Schools, Mich.; Michigan Elementary School Counselors Association.
PUB DATE 77
NOTE 34p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Counselor Role; *Delivery Systems; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Counseling; *Elementary School Counselors; Elementary School Students; Guides; Parent Participation; *Pupil Personnel Services; Pupil Personnel Workers

ABSTRACT

Elementary counselors can make many contributions to the child's development of a positive self-concept. Contributions cited in this booklet include: (1) direct counseling services to children; (2) consultation services for staff and parents; (3) coordination of school programs and community resources. The booklet also tries to communicate the need for elementary counselors to become an integral part of educational delivery systems and serves as a guide for schools, parents and others interested in elementary counseling programs. (Author/RF)

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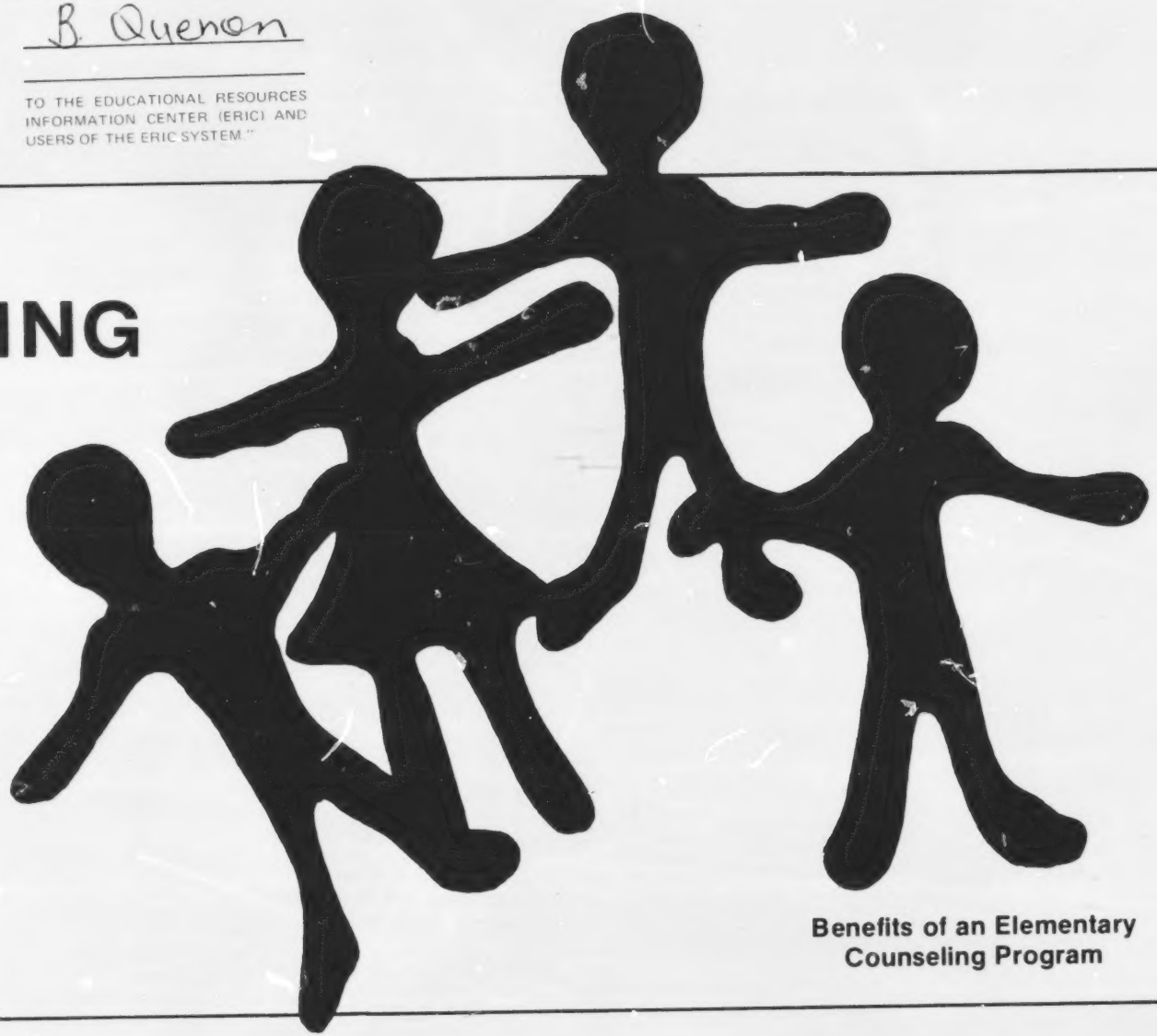

Benefits of an Elementary Counseling Program

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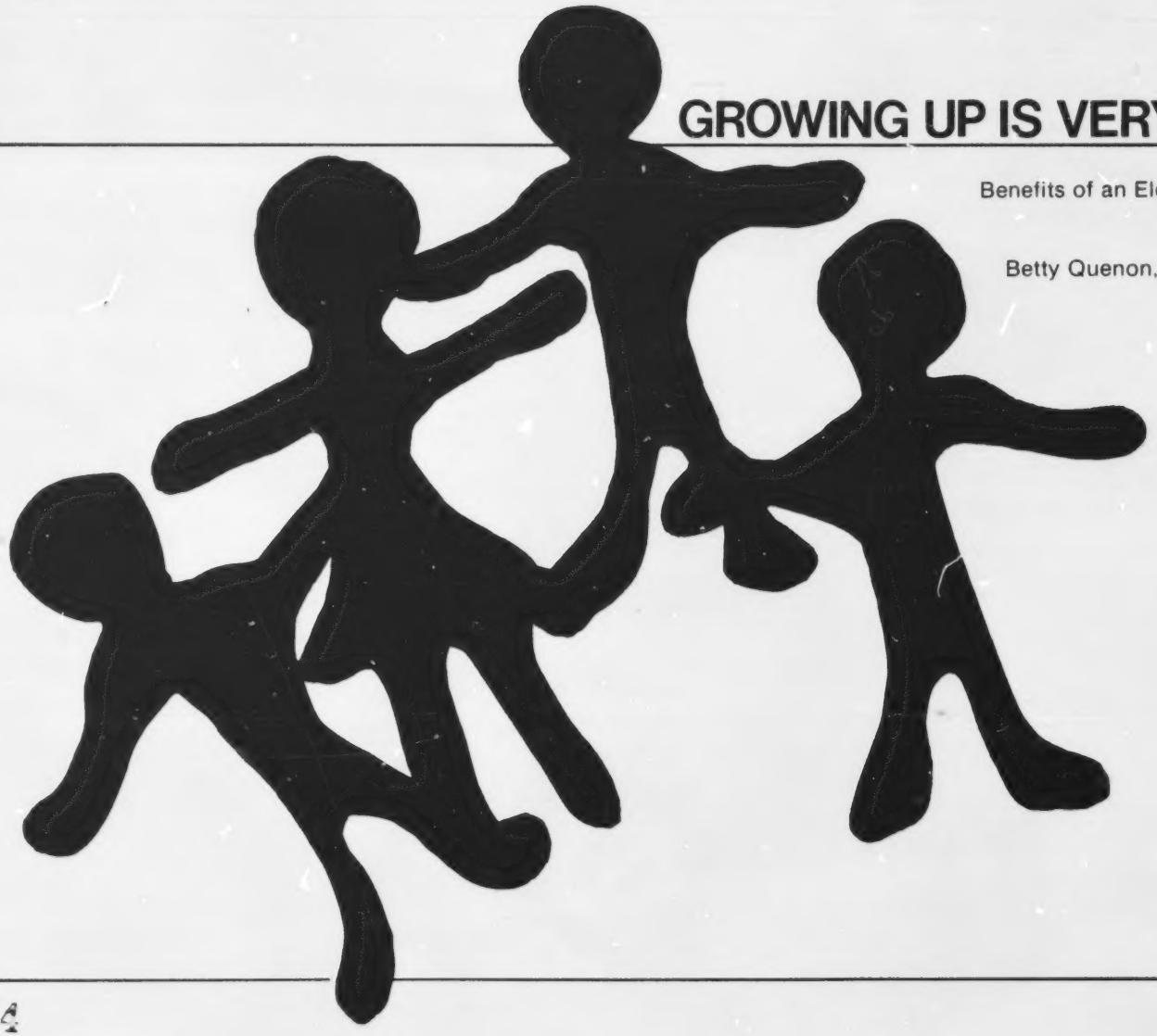

Benefits of an Elementary Counseling Program

Edited by
Betty Quenon, South Lyon Public Schools

The publication of this document was supported in whole or in part by the U.S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare under ESEA Title IV administered through the Michigan Department of Education. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position of policy of the U.S. Office of Education, and no official endorsement by the U.S. Office of Education should be inferred.

Coloma Community Schools, Coloma, Michigan, 1977

PREFACE

Since its initial consideration of Career Education in 1971, the Coloma School District has recognized the importance of the services provided by elementary counselors.

This booklet vividly describes the many contributions that elementary counselors can make to the child's development of a positive self concept. It convincingly communicates the long-felt need for elementary counselors to become an integral part of the educational delivery system in all Michigan Elementary Schools.

The Coloma School District is pleased to share this publication prepared by the Public Relations Subcommittee of the Michigan Elementary School Counselors Association.

Gerald Geik, Director
Project CDCC

William Barrett, Supt.
Coloma Schools

FOREWORD

Social scientists are saying that the problems American children face today are distinct and extraordinary compared to earlier generations. Twenty or thirty years ago, children could be much more insulated from society. Now they are directly affected by the complexities of modern life. Growing up becomes increasingly difficult with each passing year.

Concern for quality education has prompted the Michigan Elementary School Counselors Association to re-examine the current educational and social needs of children.

In light of today's social and cultural changes, the development of healthy, happy and self-assured children is of paramount importance to society. I share with members of the Michigan Elementary School Counselors Association the hope that this brochure will illustrate dramatically the need for an Elementary Counseling Program in every Michigan school district.

Donald W. Burns, Superintendent
St. Johns Public Schools

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The sun shown brightly on the tear-stained note slipped under the door. It said,

Dear Counselor,

Please see me today,
I am being retained.

Her eyes brightened when the counselor came and took her to her office. There were tears and talk, love and laughter, warmth and acceptance, and finally understanding. "My mommy and daddy said, 'Growing up is very hard to do, but now I can tell them I'm going to be able to grow up *good*!' "

For this child, her parents and her teachers, a year of frustration and failure was circumvented. What price can one place on such a positive outcome?

INTRODUCTION

Since its beginning, public education has shared with the home and the church the task of creating a mature, responsible and productive citizenry. As society has increased in complexity and sophistication, however, schools have undertaken an ever greater portion of this joint responsibility.

Many factors have contributed to the increased role schools play in the comprehensive education of our children. Among these are the problems of contemporary life that affect children in our schools:

1. Since 1970 almost half of all Americans aged five and over have changed residency, often moving to a new school district. These children frequently need assistance in adjusting to their new school and community.
2. For every two marriages in 1975, there was one divorce. Current predictions claim one out of every six children is living with only one *or* neither parent. Frequently these children come home from school to empty homes with little or no supervision.
3. Current estimates in Michigan alone state that between 10% and 15% of our adolescents have suffered child abuse and/or neglect during their early childhood ... and these figures are also rising.
4. The dramatic increase in the use of alcohol by parents and older children produces devastating effects on young children and family relationships. Current estimates place the number of persons suffering from drug and alcohol abuse in Michigan at 750,000.
5. Thousands of children under the age of 18 die annually as a result of drug usage. Recent studies indicate the age at which drug experimenting takes place is steadily being lowered. It is not uncommon for elementary schools to define their drug problem in terms of "epidemic" proportions.
6. In Michigan, one of the states hardest hit by the recession of the '70's, we have experienced several years of double figure unemployment, particularly of blue collar workers who find "interim" jobs to support their families hard to get. Stress created in these families is often displaced onto the children.
7. Integration and desegregation are currently being implemented in many Michigan communities. Without provisions for helping children adjust to these new circumstances and situations, serious problems and prejudices develop.
8. An increasing number of children are dropping out of school and/or running away from home. Ways must be found to stem this tide and build dignity for these children who have average or above average intelligence but lack economic and social skills. Estimates are that each high school drop-out is apt to cost society $75,000 in his/her lifetime.
9. The majority of petty crimes in major metropolitan areas are now committed by juveniles. Institutions of incarceration for young people in Michigan currently spend $18,000 per child per year, while only $1,500 is spent for education.
10. Estimates are that 10-15% of children in every school suffer from emotional disorders serious enough to require special intervention. Many professionals in the field of mental health advocate early diagnosis and help. They maintain this is the easiest, least expensive, and most productive plan.

The 1960 White House Conference on Children and Youth dealt with these problems in depth and recommended the development of counseling services for elementary school children. It was assumed that no educational system could help children with so many problems without a wide spectrum of support personnel beyond the overburdened classroom teacher. As a result, many Michigan school districts took advantage of the National Defense Education Act seed money to establish pilot programs in elementary guidance. These experimental elementary programs established a foundation from which our present guidance and counseling services have grown.

Components of these pilot elementary counseling programs were a) direct counseling services to children, b) consultation services for staff and parents and c) coordination of school programs and community resources.

The Elementary Counselor, a specialist in child growth and development, with a background in behavioral sciences and a high degree of competence in human relations skills, is ideally suited to implement such a program. Michigan Elementary School Counselors must also hold a valid teaching certificate, a vital aid in promoting and developing an effective Elementary Counseling Program.

DIRECT SERVICES

The major component of any Elementary Counseling Program is its direct services to children ... through individual counseling, group work, or classroom guidance.

Individual Counseling provides the child with an opportunity to examine his/her developmental, educational and social/emotional needs. Regardless of how big or how small the problems may be, a troubled child is a poor learner. Academic success or failure appears to be as deeply rooted in one's self-concept as in one's mental capacity. Through individual counseling the child can be helped to know, understand and accept him/herself. He/she then can make changes to direct and develop personal growth.

Group Work is another direct counseling service. Group counseling provides the child with an opportunity to interact with peers under the supervision of an adult from whom the child can receive support and encouragement. The basic aim of group counseling is to help normal children cope with problems they encounter in growing up. It is not a substitute for individual counseling, but it is a unique vehicle for helping children who show developmental lags in social and interpersonal skills.

A third type of direct service to children is *Classroom Guidance*. Working with the entire class, the Elementary School Counselor can promote not only individual self-competence, but group cohesiveness. Classroom guidance often has a ripple effect, promoting positive growth in teachers and administrators as well as students.

CONSULTATION SERVICES

The second component of the Elementary Counseling Program is *Consultation with Parents and Staff.* Parents are the Elementary School Counselor's most important source of information when predicting how the child will function in the school setting. Most educators feel that early involvement of parents with the school staff leads to better understanding and acceptance of the total educational program. The predominance of nuclear families in our society, as well as early marriage and parenthood, has created a generation of parents who have little understanding of the developmental needs of children and who frequently set unrealistic goals and standards for them. In a recent study, 48 teenage parents in rural Pennsylvania were evaluated as intolerant, impatient, insensitive, irritable and prone to use physical punishment. The fathers, whose average age was 17, thought babies ought to be toilet trained and able to speak at 24 weeks, and able to recognize wrongdoing at 40 weeks. The young parents expected too much, too soon, and slapped, shook and in other ways abused their infants for failing to meet unrealistic expectations.

The odds are overwhelming that children denied effective parenting will be unable to compete with their peers in school or in adult life. Experts in the field of child abuse are demanding that we stop giving so much after-the-fact help and instead give more before-the-fact services EARLY. That is why Elementary School Counselors feel that Parent Education, which promotes an understanding of the physical and psychological needs and developmental tasks of young children is an appropriate part of the counselor's assignment. When such consultation is available, the response of parents has been overwhelmingly positive.

Elementary School Counselors place a very high priority on consultation with staff as well as parents. Teachers and counselors work closely to develop an educational plan which can personalize the child's learning environment. Many educators feel that students learn - not from *what* they are taught - but from *how* they are taught. Sometimes the problem lies not with the child but with various elements within the school. In such cases, consultation with staff provides valuable growth for all concerned.

COORDINATION SERVICES

The third component of the Elementary Counseling Program includes both *Program Development and Coordination of Community Resources*. The Elementary School Counselor is a vital force in humanizing school programs. Some typical programs implemented or fostered by Elementary School Counselors are discussed below.

Kindergarten Orientation is a high priority item for most administrators who often entrust development and execution of such a program to the counselor. This program provides an ideal opportunity to meet with parents and to discuss the needs of children and their expectations as well as the educational program and support services offered by the school.

Elementary School Counselors frequently are responsible for planning and conducting *Case Conferences* with other child specialists to develop educational programs for individual children. Because of their unique liaison role between teachers and other support personnel, follow-through on delivery of services recommended at such case conferences is often the responsibility of the Elementary School Counselor. Therefore, he/she is an invaluable link to wider services for children. Using the individual expertise of all helping professionals in the district - speech therapist, reading consultant, learning disabilities specialist, school nurse, social worker, psychologist, etc. - provides the child with maximum opportunities to improve his/her feelings of self-worth and reach his/her full potential. In a similar way, the Elementary School Counselor coordinates *Pre-Screening Conferences* to determine the need for full psychological evaluation with the principal, psychologist and school social worker. Sometimes the pre-screening process can divert energies from a full diagnosis when there is advance evidence that a given child would not qualify for Mandatory Special Education.

Because Elementary School Counselors are committed to developmental and preventive guidance, they have also been instrumental in setting up *Transition Programs* to Middle School and Junior High. Working closely with counselors from those educational settings, such orientation programs have been extremely well received by both students and parents. Frequently, such programs are not implemented unless a school district employs counselors.

With the passage of Public Law 97, known as the Michigan Career Education Act, Elementary School Counselors assisted in the implementation and coordination of *Career Education* within their school districts. Career Education is a lifelong procese, the first step of which is self-awareness. Many significant adults contribute to the child's sense of self - notably parents and teachers - but the Elementary School Counselor is in a unique position, by virtue of training and role, to guide children in becoming self-aware. The counselor's provision of materials, ideas and activities to teachers, administrators and children permits the Career Education Program to develop in an organized and effective way.

Elementary School Counselors are noted for their ability to anticipate needs and to promote new, innovative educational and creative programs for children. For example, Elementary School Counselors, anticipating future legislation which will mandate programs for *The Gifted Child*, have already helped to establish pilot programs for gifted students in their school districts.

iMPLEMENTING NEW TECHNIQUES

Elementary School Counselors are noted for their enduring interest in acquiring new skills in order to accomdate rapid changes in our society and the impact they have on children. It is rare to find an Elementary School Counselor who has not availed him/herself of workshops which provide new approaches to the complex problems of today.

Some of these newer areas of skill are: decision-making, values clarification (a term which means helping young people understand *their* values as opposed to the indoctrination of values by the adult in charge), relaxation and desensitization training (for minimizing normal tensions and freeing energies for productive, academic development), cognitive restructuring (a unique way of helping children correct misconceptions about themselves and their worth) and assertive training (helping the child to counteract forces which may inhibit his/her development).

The areas of death, divorce and interpersonal communication are others which Elementary School Counselors have investigated in order to help children cope with life today. There is an acute awareness of our human inability to deal effectively with death. Experts have identified a series of stages one goes through in order to accept death. Elementary School Counselors have studied these stages and have been an invaluable help both to parents and their children when death has come to a family.

Divorce affects approximately half the elementary school population. Support groups for children, led by Elementary School Counselors, make it possible for the children to work through the intense feelings surrounding the divorce of their parents.

Parent education training and Transactional Analysis are two new approaches Elementary School Counselors can use in teaching communication skills to parents and children. These skills, when practiced, can help to develop and maintain strong family structures.

PRESENT PROGRAMS

Michigan ranks seventh in the nation in number of elementary schools, but only 13th in the total number of Elementary School Counselors and our rate of growth in this area is diminishing. Currently we are 40th in number of Elementary School Counselors employed in relation to the number of schools (one for every 13 schools) Encouraging signs that this trend in Michigan is being reversed are the addition of 40 elementary counselors to the Detroit Public Schools and appropriations from the State legislature for pilot Elementary Counseling Programs. Since 1967, when the federal government provided seed money for elementary counseling, programs have been established in all 50 states. Despite the elimination of federal funds, the recession and tight school budgets, a recent study shows a steady rise in Elementary Counseling Programs across the nation. In 1967 there were 3,837 Elementary School Counselors in 48 states with only 22% of them supported by state and local funds. In 1975, less than ten years later, there were 10,770 Elementary School Counselors with 67% supported by state and local funding.

Clearly, school districts throughout the nation are convinced that developmental and preventive guidance at the elementary level is an essential component of the educational system. Teachers who have worked in school districts with Elementary School Counselors have ranked counseling as one of the top three priorities in support services. Parents who have experienced the benefits of an Elementary Counseling Program place it in very high esteem. In one district, parents, when asked which position was most needed in the school, responded the counselor was more important than the curriculum director, special reading teacher, and after-school recreation director. A recent study of Elementary Counseling Programs in Florida, which ranks first in the nation in the employment of Elementary School Counselors, reported important and concrete benefits of a Counseling Program in elementary schools. These included the fact that there was significant improvement in academic performance by students who received counseling; that their record of promotion was better than that of the general school population; and that they showed a significant, positive increase in self-concept. The factor which appears to have a stronger relationship to achievement than do all the other "school" factors together is the extent to which an individual child sees him/herself as competent and feels that he/she has some control over his/her destiny. The results of the Florida study then become a dramatic testimony to the need for Elementary Counseling Programs in every school district in Michigan.

Other states also recognize this need. In the 1975-76 school year, the state of Pennsylvania funded forty new Elementary Counseling Programs.

CONCLUSION

Services of an Elementary School Counselor are *not* incidental, but *essential*, whether mandated or not. In schools without an Elementary Counseling Program, counselor services, if available at all, must be provided by other personnel. When disciplinarian and/or authoritative roles are combined with the counseling role, they become incompatible at best and contradictory at worst.

We live in an age of specialists and our children are our most important asset. To deny them services which are now available to promote their total development, can hinder their growth into mature, responsible, and productive citizens.

GROWING UP IS VERY HARD TO DO IN THE COMPLEX SOCIETY OF TODAY. Every child in the state of Michigan deserves to benefit from the services of an Elementary Counseling Program.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Creation of this brochure was only possible through the dedicated efforts of Mary Abbott Lokken, Margaret DeLoach, Mike Musci, Jim Moore, and Maurice Prince. These writers are grateful for suggestions from committee members Gloria Graber, Jeff Richburg, and Ben Thomas. Review of the final manuscript was done by Dr. James Costar and Dr. Norman Stewart, Counselor Educators at Michigan State University.

Betty Quenon, Chairperson

PUBLIC RELATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE MICHIGAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS ASSOCIATION

Mary Abbott Lokken, Counselor,
Waverly Public Schools

Margaret DeLoach, Principal,
Bullock Creek Public Schools

Michael Musci, Counselor,
Okemos Public Schools

Jim Moore, Counselor,
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Maurice Prince, Guidance Consultant,
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